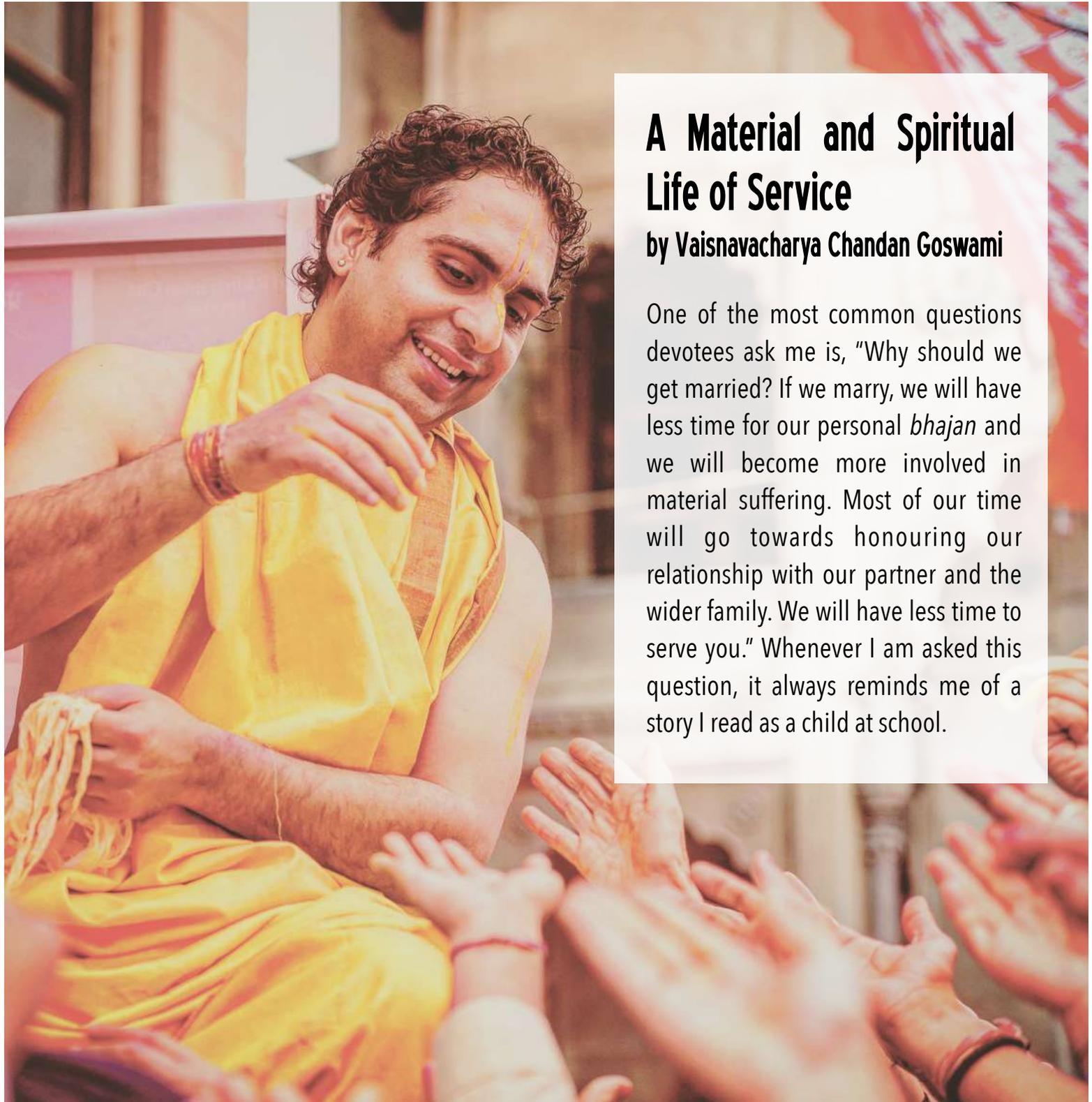




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A Material and Spiritual Life of Service

by Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswami

One of the most common questions devotees ask me is, "Why should we get married? If we marry, we will have less time for our personal *bhajan* and we will become more involved in material suffering. Most of our time will go towards honouring our relationship with our partner and the wider family. We will have less time to serve you." Whenever I am asked this question, it always reminds me of a story I read as a child at school.

There once was a saint who was approached by three boys. These boys wanted his blessings to live a life of celibacy in complete solitude. The saint smiled and asked them to live together in a single hut. He left them with the following instructions: "Amongst the three of you, one will take the role of a mother, one of a father, and one of a child. Every so often, you must switch roles." The saint went on to say, "I want you to find perfect harmony by always considering the needs of one another."

The boys looked at each other very confused. Why would their guru suggest such an arrangement? Yet, they followed his guidelines without any questions. By doing so, they realised that working at human relationships was the perfect tool for polishing their rough edges and for tapping into the core of the divinity that lay within them.

This method also applies to us. If we become a yogi or a Babaji and go to an ashram, we will start living with other Babajis. Our interactions with them would help us grow as devotees, and perfect our capacity to serve and love. If the Babaji lives without interacting with his brothers, he would not be considered the best example in that ashram and this behaviour would limit how much he learns. Similarly, even if you live in complete solitude, you have to live with yourself, and without the lessons of dealing with others, dealing with your own mind is extremely difficult.

So, going back to the original question, my answer is, "Marriage is a practice that teaches us how to serve according to the likes and dislikes of others, and not our own. This will prepare us for serving the saints and devotees, when the opportunity arises."



Siddh Gaurang Das Babaji and the Divine Trees of Vrindavan



"Do not worry if there is anything that is causing you pain. Just go to any tree in Vrindavan and share your troubles with them. Every tree in Vrindavan is a *kalpataru* (wish-giving tree). If you put your arms around them and reveal what is in your heart, they listen and help. There is nothing the trees of Vrindavan cannot help you with. They can even grant you the most cherished treasures of your heart – Radha and Krishn – if you so desire." - Siddh Gaurang Das Babaji



Siddh Gaurang Das Babaji

Siddh Gaurang Das Babaji was born in 1887 CE, to a wealthy, high-class Brahmin family in Bengal. His childhood name was Dhirendranath Chakravarti. He was a genius, and could remember anything after hearing it only once. When he was still in college, he met his guru, the great saint and *kirtaniya* Shri Ramdas Babaji Maharaj. Dhirendranath often skipped class to spend time with him and receive his teachings. Still, Dhirendranath did

well in school, and graduated from Kolkata's prestigious Scottish Church College with a Master's degree.

But despite his worldly wealth and success, he had no attachment to material life. Thus, after graduation, Dhirendranth left home to live in his guru's *ashram*. His guru, Ramdas Babaji, recognised him as a fully-blossomed soul, who was ready for full renunciation.

Normally, Ramdas Babaji never gave the rites of renunciation (Babaji *vesh*) to anyone, but he made an exception for Dhirendranath. He named him Gaurang Das Babaji. Soon, by his guru's blessings, Gaurang Das Babaji left Bengal to live in Vrindavan forever.

Gaurang Das Babaji learned from several great saints of his time, including Shri Jagdish Das Babaji and Shri Lalita Sakhi Dasi. He studied the *Shrimad Bhagwatam* and other scriptures under Siddh Ramkrishn Das Pandit Baba. He also studied the Brajbhasha *vani granths* under him. Even though Shri Gaurang Das Babaji was a Bengali, he only spoke Brajbhasha in daily life. In fact, he spoke it so well that many Brajwasis doubted if he was really Bengali.

Whenever devotees would come from Vrindavan to Bengal, Ramdas Babaji would ask for news of his disciples. When he heard about Gaurang Das Babaji's *bhajan*, tears of joy would roll down his cheeks.

Life in Vrindavan

In Vrindavan, Gaurang Das Babaji lived a life of true renunciation. Wearing only a rough jute cloth around his waist, he roamed from place to place crying "Ha Radhe! Ha Priya Ju!"

For survival, he collected alms (*madhukari*) from the Brajwasis once a day. To save time, he often fasted, or ate only leaves. On other

days, he lived on fruits that he found in the forest. Sometimes, he would lay on the ground in a trance for days on end. Brajwasis would bring food for him but he was unable to see the food they brought, let alone eat it, because he was completely absorbed in the *lila* of Radha and Krishn.

Gaurang Das Babaji and the Trees of Vrindavan

Gaurang Das Babaji loved the trees of Vrindavan very much. One winter day, it started to rain, which intensified the cold. Gaurang Das Baba took shelter in the hollow of an old tree. But he did not think about the cold. He only thought of Radha and Krishn, and wept in separation from them.

Suddenly, a nearby tree began to speak. It said to the tree Gaurang Das Babaji was hiding in, "Look! A great soul has taken your shelter. You should bless him."

The tree laughed and replied, "Why don't you bless him?"

At that moment, a beautiful peacock flew down from the neighbouring tree, and stood in front of Baba with its tail feathers spread. Then another peacock flew down, and another, until they formed a half-moon shape around Baba. Then, in the centre of the peacocks, Shri Krishn appeared, with his peacock feather crown and yellow dress, smiling as he played his flute.

Later, Baba started living in a small *kutir* (hut) in the Raman Reti area of Vrindavan. Baba was a very good speaker. The Brajwasis and other Vaishnavs loved to hear him give *katha*, especially on the scriptures *Vrindavan Mahimamrit* and *Radha Ras Sudha Nidhi*.

The trees of Vrindavan also used to love hearing him speak. Each day, Baba would read to the trees outside his hut. One evening, Baba came home late from collecting alms, so he could not read for the trees like he normally did. As he went inside his *kutir*, he heard a tree say "Baba! Won't you read to us today?"

Baba folded his hands and replied sadly, "Maharaj, I am a renounced man. I don't even own a lamp or a match to light it. I cannot read to you in the dark."

Lovingly the tree replied, "Come and see what I brought for you."

In a hole of the tree, Baba found a large candle and a box of matches. Using these, he was able to read to the trees after all.

For thirty-five years, Baba lived deep in the forests of Vrindavan. Then, in the later part of his life, Baba's spiritual uncle asked him to start living at his ashram, called Radharaman Nivas, in Raman Reti. The ashram became the home of Baba and his renounced disciples for the rest of his life.

Baba never allowed anyone to pluck the leaves from the ashram's neem trees. Once, a branch began to grow very long and low. It was blocking the devotees' view during the daily scriptural reading. Baba asked his disciple Manohar Das Baba to tie the branch up. However, when Manohar Das did so, Baba began to experience a sharp pain in his chest. He told Manohar Das to untie the branch immediately.

The next day, Baba saw the tree personified as a little Brajwasi boy, glowing with a divine light. The boy was crying. He said, "Baba, how could you tie me up? You have not come here to bind souls, but to free them." Baba bowed to the tree and asked him for forgiveness.



The tree tied by Manohar Das

Nitya Lila

In December of 1953 CE, Gaurang Das Babaji's guru, Ramdas Babaji, departed for *nitya lila*. The feeling of separation and longing to meet him once more overwhelmed Gaurang Das Babaji completely. He stopped eating and remained in his *kutir* for twelve days.

One day, during this time, Baba's disciple Braj Kishor Das Babaji was sitting on the floor by Baba's bedside, with his head on Baba's bed. It was early morning on *Gita Jayanti*, just before dawn. Suddenly, Braj Kishor Dasji saw

a lady in a white dress, whom he had never seen before. The lady moved forward and placed her hand on Baba's head. And just for a moment, Braj Kishor Dasji could see that this lady was Baba's guru in his *manjari swaroop*. Then she disappeared. He felt this was a sign that Baba would enter *nitya lila* that day. And that afternoon, his prediction came true.

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The 477th Appearance Day of Shri Radharaman Lal

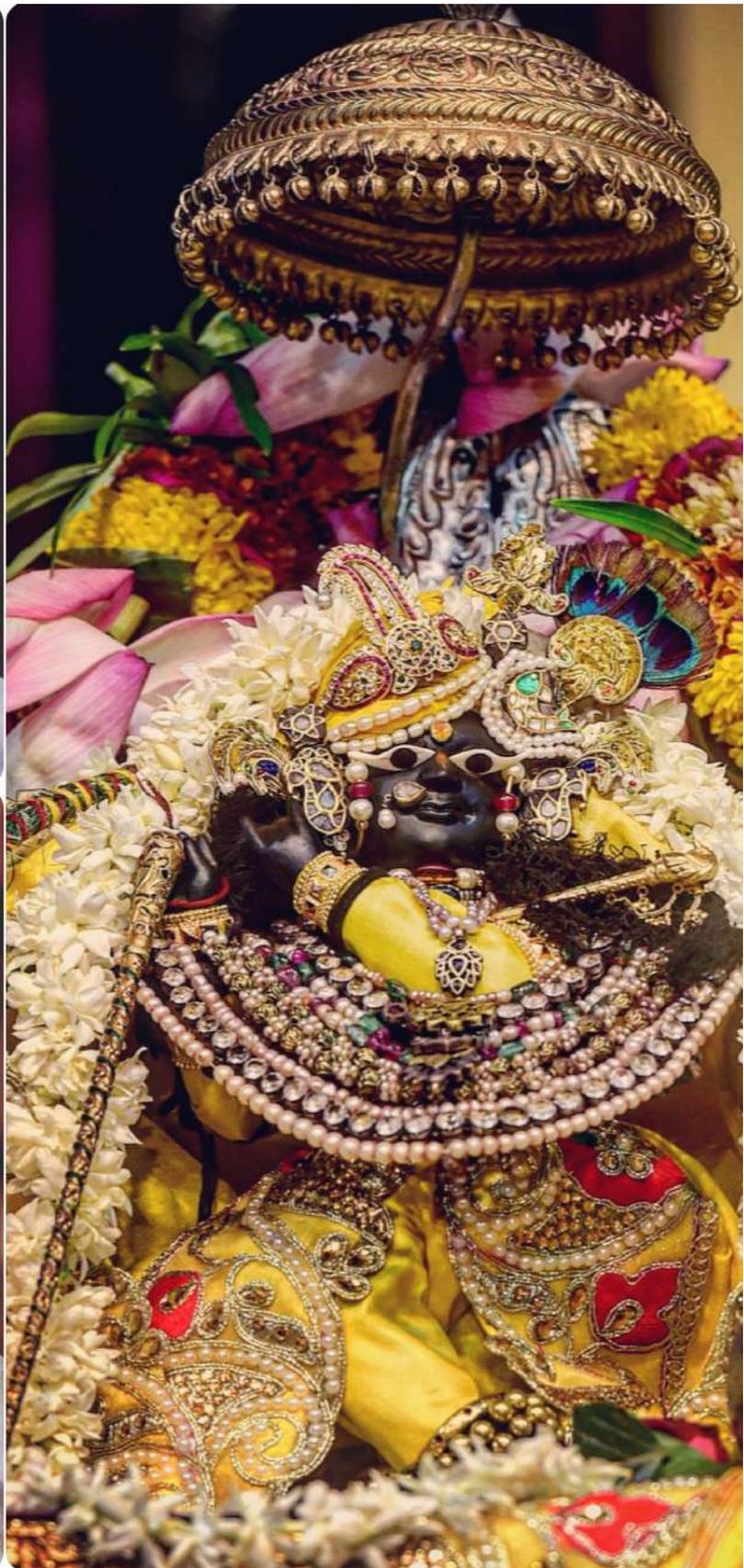


भक्त्या गोपालभट्टस्य जनिदामोदराश्मनः ।
तं राधारमणं वन्दे सार्णस्क घनमेचकम् ॥

*bhaktyā gopāla-bhaṭṭasya jani-dāmodarāśmanaḥ
taṁ rādhāramaṇaṁ vande sārṇaska ghana-mecakam*

"I offer my humble adoration to Śhrī Rādhāramaṇjī, whose form is beautifully dark like a raincloud, and who manifested from Dāmodar śhāligrām śhilā by the blessed loving devotion of Śhrī Gopāl Bhaṭṭ Goswāmī." (Śhrī Rādhāramaṇāṣṭakam, verse 1)

The bells rang in anticipation as Shri Radharaman Lal's *abhishek* began. It was his appearance day, and the devotees had waited for this moment all year. The altar was sparkling with a colourful canopy, garlands and auspicious banana trees. The *manjaris* (Goswamis) drew the curtains, revealing Shriji's glorious *nikunj*.







His dark form rained the sweetness of his *darshan*, stealing away the summer heat and soothing the burning separation his lovers felt for him, just as he did for the devotees 477 years ago, especially his dearest Gopal Bhatt Goswami.

The eyes and hearts of all were fixated upon his beautiful form, adorned with gold jewellery and dressed all in white, which contrasted so gracefully against his dark body, like moonlight glistening upon the ocean. He was bathed in ghee, milk, yoghurt, honey, and pure Yamuna water with all the Vedic rituals. After the *abhishek*, *panchamrit prasadi* was distributed to the devotees, along with *cheer prasadi* – strips of the cloth that Shriji wore during the ritual.

Meanwhile, Shriji was dressed in the finest jewels and yellow silks, and an auspicious *raaj tilak* of *kumkum* and rice was offered to his brow. Prayers were sung and *aarti* was offered. And with all their love, the Goswamis and all the devotees raised their hands in blessing, praying for Shriji's eternal happiness and wellbeing.

Jai Jai Radharaman Lal
Jai Jai Jai Shri Bhatt Gopal

